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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Andrew Dobson, *Listening for Democracy: Recognition, Representation, Reconciliation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 224pp. (pbk).

The greatest compliment that a reviewer can pay to a book is that reading it left them feeling wiser. This is undoubtedly the case with Andrew Dobson's *Listening for Democracy*. This is the best book that I have read on the emerging theme of 'listening' as a cultural act and is a must-read for scholars and practitioners who want to understand what active listening entails.

Why has listening occupied the minds of so many scholars in recent years? I think it is because 'freedom of speech', which has been such a vital element of struggles for democracy from the eighteenth century onwards, is increasingly recognised as being incomplete and unrewarding when it is confined to a monological form. Listening attunes the democratic sensibility to the presence of other voices, histories and commitments. Dobson sets out not only to demonstrate 'how attention to listening can add positively to ... some of the more transformative and optimistic theories of democracy' (p.17), but to explain why it is that attention to listening is so routinely ignored by theorists and practitioners of democracy. Those are the two overarching questions of this book and both are answered with considerable insight and eloquence.

One of the strongest aspects of the analysis relates to a distinction, derived from Leonard Waks, between 'cataphatic' and 'apophatic' listening (pp.66-8). Cataphatic listeners impose pre-determined categories upon what they hear, often to the extent of filtering what is being said to them into an order of sense-making that has nothing to do with what the speaker intended to convey. Such listeners set out to use what they hear to fit in with the categories with which they feel intellectually comfortable. As a political communication scholar, I have witnessed a lot of this kind of cataphatic listening: politicians who want to 'hear from the public', but only when the public is speaking their language; opinion pollsters who are less interested in hearing what people think than what they are prepared to say in response to questions that are not of their own making; government consultations designed to rubber-stamp already-made decisions; and journalists whose questions matter much more to them than anything approaching an original answer. Indeed, we might say that bureaucratic society is predicated upon the dull rigidity of cataphatic listening. It is the aural totalitarianism of the call centre in which only anticipated questions or answers count. Apophatic listening, which entails 'holding one's own categories in abeyance' (p.68) accords with the ironic disposition identified by the philosopher, Richard Rorty: an approach to communication that refuses the allure of 'the final vocabulary'. Dobson associates apophatic listening with what he calls 'sensory democracy' (p.17). This is a mode of democratic communication that pays attention to the receptive side of public discourse. Unlike the US Fox TV ideal of democracy, in which the right to rant and defame is uncritically celebrated, a sensory democracy would place greater normative emphasis upon opportunities to be understood, even by those least prone to want to understand you. Listeners, in this sense, assume an ethical responsibility; an openness to the potentially disturbing message.

Dobson concludes with some recommendations for institutionalising political listening. He addresses three relationships here: politicians to constituents; politicians to politicians; and governments to publics. There is surely scope here for a much broader range of attentional

relationships, including citizens to politicians, journalists to citizens and vice versa and, perhaps most importantly, citizens to citizens. In this rather limited range, Dobson places himself at the more conservative end of thinking about political communication – a place that I feel quite sure his broader analysis doesn't belong. Dobson asks whether it is 'too far-fetched to imagine a professionalization of political representation, part of which would involve exposure to the skills of listening' (p.176). There is a forceful case for this, but selling the need for it to politicians would be extremely challenging. Most of them think that they are already very good listeners (although they will often note how bad at listening many of their colleagues are). And many politicians will say, privately at least, that listening to citizens is over-rated; the task of politicians is to lead rather than to gather together the noise of the governed. I am wholly unconvinced by either of these claims and Dobson's call for training appeals to me, but I think that it would be strengthened by two further calls for cultural change. The first would look towards forms of innovative civic education designed to enhance active listening. Politicians do not simply need to listen harder, but to be scrutinised better by citizens who are capable of hearing through the froth. Secondly, we need constitutional mechanisms for dialogic communication that can integrate public discourse into real decision-making. My proposal with Jay Blumler for an online civic commons is just one model that might be worthy of consideration. Indeed, Dobson himself argues that 'we need to look ... for models of good "government-to-the-people" listening' (p.186). I would endorse that, particularly if it were expressed as a two-way process.

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Adrian Parr, *The Wrath of Capital: Neoliberalism and Climate Change Politics*, New York, NY: New York University Press 2013, 232 pp. (pbk).

In the *Wrath of Capital* Adrian Parr sets out to develop a critical engagement with the relations between neoliberalism and climate change politics. Underpinning the 'massive environmental changes happening around the world, of which climate change is an important factor', is, she argues, 'an unchanging socio-economic condition (neoliberal capitalism)'. The result is a 'political crisis' (3). Interrogating the relations between neoliberalism and climate change politics is clearly a timely and urgent project and the book offers some significant insights into how this might be done. The opening chapter of the book sets out a framing position analysing 'climate capitalism' and a second chapter then analyses some of the ways in which processes of neoliberalisation have been worked through and intensified through the constructions of markets for carbon and processes of offsetting. The remaining chapters provide six cuts through different issues which bear on the relations between climate change and neoliberalism. These are population; water politics; the politics of food and hunger; animal production in the industrial food complex; attempts to construct green urbanism and on the politics of oil before offering concluding reflections on the 'danger zone' in which we are currently living in.

This thematic approach is useful for setting out the scale of the problem and giving a sense of the myriad relations between processes contributing to climate change and neoliberal social, economic and environmental relations. The approach, however, also tends to produce a rather general approach which lacks specificity in relation to particular articulations of climate change politics. In this regard one of the key tensions with the book is the way that it often functions to provide general accounts of the relations between neoliberalism and environmental problems. These accounts are always readable and informative, but they tend not to help

develop a particular purchase on the particular relations and practices through which neoliberalism and climate change politics are articulated. In this review I pull out key issues which are raised by the book but which need much more substantive interrogation for a compelling account of the relations between neoliberalism and climate change.

A first issue in this regard relates to the theorization of neoliberalism in the text. Given that debates on different approaches to ways of understanding neoliberalism are now voluminous it is perhaps unfair to expect a detailed exposition of the ways in which neoliberalism is theorized. Nonetheless some more explicit reflection on how neoliberalism was to be approached and understood would have helped clarify the theoretical project here. There is a key tension between the way the text at times positions neoliberal capitalism as an 'unchanging socio-economic condition' and other points where there is a more dynamic approach to the theorization of neoliberalism. Thus in chapter four there is a detailed engagement with Hardt and Negri's account of biopolitical production which shapes a more processual and dynamic understanding of neoliberalism (61). This gestures to a more ongoing and contested way of understanding processes of neoliberalisation. This is important as viewing neoliberalisation as an always already contested set of processes and relations can make it easier to understand the construction of alternative and oppositional forms of agency. In this regard it would have been useful to have had a more consistent engagement with oppositional forms of agency which are attempting to challenge the terms of existing links between climate change politics and neoliberalism.

Despite this Parr makes some perceptive comments on the articulation of alternatives to neoliberalism. I think she is particularly strong in relation to her critical interrogation of some of the emerging discourses around commons as a way of thinking about more ecologically and socially just futures. Thus she develops an insightful critique of Elinor Ostrom's work on community management of water resources. She argues that 'the self-management model marginalizes transnational and supralocal power relations as well as the way in which these relations structure the commons and its products' (62). This usefully challenges some of the ways in which commoning is invoked in rather unproblematised and at times romanticized ways. In this regard an engagement with the work of figures such as Peter Linebaugh who have positioned commoning practices as emerging at the intersections of different translocal struggles and resistances would have helped develop this critical position (see Linebaugh, 2014).

Parr's creative engagement with alternative political strategies such as commoning does, however, make the lack of any sustained discussion of climate justice in the text I do find it remarkable that a text seeking to develop a detailed account of relations between neoliberalism and climate change politics barely mentions climate justice, there is one reference in the context of debates over reproductive rights (143). Given that climate justice has emerged as central to radical climate politics and has also been central to attempts to shift academic debates on climate politics in more critical directions this is a striking omission. That is not to say the terms on which claims for climate justice have been mobilized are not uncontested. Indeed, one of the key reasons why it is necessary to engage with debates around climate justice is precisely because struggles over how the term is to be used and articulated has been central to shaping different visions and futures for climate politics, e.g. different political positions have been taken in such debates in relation to neoliberalism.

At times, such as in the wake of the Copenhagen protests, these debates have been relatively unproductive, while at other times they have been generative. To ignore such debates is to ignore the vibrant forms of radical climate politics which are bringing the relations between climate politics and actually existing neoliberalism into contestation. It is to write in ways which are distanced from the terms on which struggles are attempting to generate forms of radical climate politics. It is also to ignore some of the best and most critically engaged writing on these issues by academics such as Patrick Bond and important political interventions such as the Bali Principles of Climate Justice. This important document from 2002 drew on the framings of the

US environmental justice movement to open up a systematic critique of the unequal processes being exacerbated by dominant responses to climate change. An engagement with texts such as this could have made an engagement with the terms of oppositional climate change politics and their critiques of neoliberalism much more central to the book.

The Wrath of Capital is a timely interrogation of the relations between climate change politics and neoliberalism which makes many thoughtful interventions. It gives a powerful sense of the depth of inter-relation between neoliberalism and diverse aspects of climate change politics. Its utility as a text for thinking about different articulations of, and futures for, climate change politics, however, is limited by its occlusion of the diverse movements and solidarities being forged through struggles for climate justice.

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References

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Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2013, 279 pp (hbk).

This, rather remarkable, book was first published in 2010. Its appearance in paperback is to be welcomed. Its chief focus is on three 'nodal' cities, Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria but it also considers, among other things, the large number of Syrians in Brazil, as well as extensive networks of foreign labour, principally drawn from Southern Europe, which converged on the Eastern Mediterranean. More specifically, it considers the formulation and import of radical leftist ideas that circulated there from the late nineteenth century. Makdisi characterises these ideas as 'selective adaptations of socialist and anarchist principles' (p. 1), which sought social justice, workers' rights, and mass secular education, among other things. She explains how a culture of contestation emerged in Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria. This was not an isolated phenomenon. In fact, Makdisi suggests, radicals in those cities were part of an emerging global network of radical thinkers and activists. Thus, concerning anarchists, she posits that Alexandria was 'a necessary stop on the anarchist Grand Tour' (p. 120): a Clapham Junction in the global anarchist scene. In this context, and more generally, she relates the 'geography of contestation' (p. 131) in the Eastern Mediterranean to its manifestation world-wide.

Changes in communications (including the telegraph, Suez Canal, news agencies, and postal system), the growth of banking facilities and population growth facilitated the growth of this network; so too did patterns of migration as well as, in the case of Egypt, land ownership. Specifically, large numbers of artisans, craftsmen and white-collar workers moved to Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria. Makdisi's study explores the ways in which these migrants expressed and exchanged ideas, notably via pamphlets, newspapers, discussions, coffeehouses, study-circles, strikes, and the theatre, among others. In doing so, she emphasises the illusory nature of a 'pure left'. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the left comprised 'a package of (sometimes inchoate) ideas and practices' (p. 8). The book explores these ideas which, she contests, have been overshadowed by preoccupation, in teleological manner, with the emergence of Arab nationalism. In doing so, Makdisi disclaims any idea of comprehensive coverage. Rather, her focus is on a certain networks and ideas which converged on the Eastern Mediterranean. Importantly, it is suggested that radicalism and nationalism were inextricably connected. The intermingling of their component parts was central to their respective development (p. 169).

The intellectual framework for the emergence of these networks was one of ferment. From the late 1800s, anarchism, anarchosyndicalism, freemasonry, as well as wide-ranging anti-colonial movements, among them pan-Islamism, were elements in the 'bricolage' which comprised radicalism in the Eastern Mediterranean.

All of this presents the reader with a beguiling thesis. The author has searched *across* many archival collections, in several languages, and the underlying intelligence and perceptiveness which sustains the investigation shines through. Admittedly, this reviewer is more accustomed to top-down studies, of which this clearly is not an example, which derive from systematic, and linear, archival work. In terms of research, the effect here is more one of patch-work, albeit rich, varied and multi-lingual. The effect is dazzling and the subject really comes to life. If one criticism were to be ventured, then occasionally one senses that the evidence to sustain the thesis is a little thin. There are a number of occasions when the phrase 'must have' is used (twice on page 84 alone) to sustain the trajectory of an argument when primary evidence is lacking. That said, I learnt a great deal from this book and I would recommend it highly to anyone who is interested in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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Ayhan Aktar, Niyazi Kizilyurek and Umut Ozkirimli (eds), *Nationalism in the Troubled Triangle. Cyprus, Greece and Turkey*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 288pp. (hbk).

Antonio Gramsci in the Prison Notebooks states that 'History has left in us an infinity of traces', but there is no inventory. Therefore, Gramsci continues, 'the task is to compile an inventory of the traces that history has left in us'. And this seems to be the most interesting task, the task of interpretation. The notion of writing a historical inventory is to try to understand oneself in relation to the other and to understand the other as if you understand yourself. This volume has tried to follow that task questioning the traditional nationalist discourses.

The book 'Nationalism in the Troubled Triangle' is a collection of fifteen papers presented at a 2006 conference held by the University of Cyprus delivered by academics engaged with the study of nationalism in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. Experts and mostly young researchers challenge the established nationalist narratives by examining nationalism from a comparative critical perspective on history and politics in the context of the above countries. In particular they emphasize the differences and the similarities in the historical construction of Greek and Turkish nationalism. Differences refer to the nation-building process which took place in Greece from 'nation' to 'state' while in Turkey from 'state' to 'nation'. On the other hand, similarities refer to the nationalist strategy of homogenisation of the population and the treatment of Cyprus as an extension of the 'Greek' and 'Turkish' nations. The essays compare the prominent issues of political leadership, institutions and foreign policies which are central to the study of nationalism. The main issue that this volume addresses is the need for an understanding of the competing perceptions of nationalism through the prism of Greek and Turkish 'national' history. The book is developed in a dialectical style that is sumptuous and pleasant to read.

The introductory chapter written by Professor John Breuilly examines the relationship between history-writing and the nation-state formation. Based on the constructivist approach which claims that nationalism is not an expression of the nation but rather a transnational phenomenon which in itself constructs nations, the chapter illustrates the new approach of

historians who write a modernist history of nationalism. He indicates the need to theorise Turkish and Greek nationalisms outside the prism of their 'national' histories.

The first part (chapters 2-9) deals with the Turkish and the Greek versions of nationalism. In chapter two, Ayhan Aktar explains from an evolutionary perspective the stages of the Turkification process while the anthropologist Aydin (chapter 3) deconstructs the use of the 'Turkish History Thesis' project and the use of archaeology in early Republican Turkey. In Chapter four, Ozdogan, elaborately analysing statist Turkish patriotism, while in Chapter five, Hircshon explores the religious affiliation of contemporary Greek national identity. In Chapter six, Sofos and Ozkirimli comparatively examine the social forces that shaped Greek and Turkish Nationalism emphasizing the complicated conversion from empire to the 'nation-states'. In Chapter seven, Zanou annotates the role of distance and nostalgia in the formation of Greek national identity. In chapters eight and nine, Inanc and Tzimtras, are engaging with the implementation and the practice of nationalism in Turkish and Greek foreign policy respectively.

The second part (Chapters 10-15) deals with the past and the present of nationalism in Cyprus. In Chapters ten and eleven thirteen, Michael, Nevzat and Anagnostopoulou, explore the relationship between traditional religious authority and nationalism in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot community. In Chapter twelve Kizilyurek associates the rise and the fall of the political career of Rauf Denktas with the rise and the fall of the 'fear' among the Turkish Cypriot community of being dominated by the Greek Cypriots. The Chapters fourteen and fifteen from Mavratsas and Tombazos draw upon the relationship between the nationalism and the Left in Cyprus.

In short, the majority of the views expressed in this volume is an interesting and informative account of various aspects of politics of nationalism in what the editors argue is a "Troubled Triangle." Although some chapters have already been published they are welcomed as a contribution to the vast subject of nationalism. However readers interested in south-east Europe region, and especially in Greek-Turkish relations, have to take into account the developments in global and regional politics and the evolving power balance game in order to fully grasp the historical trajectory of the politics of nationalism in the countries in question. For instance, difficulties in reaching a solution at the Cyprus issue is often attributed to the conflicting nationalisms omitting to contextualise their emergence and development within the framework of geostrategic interests of the involved parties. Finally, the book does not take into account the particular role of British rule in Cyprus that set the political and ideological context wherein Turkish Cypriot nationalism emerged, thus providing fertile ground for further research on the specific role of British imperialism in the island.

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